

**Oxfam Management Response to the review of *Women’s Empowerment in Ethiopia: Evaluation of women’s beekeeping and access to financial services (Effectiveness Review Series 2013/14)***

<b>Prepared by:</b>	<i>Mulu Tesfaye</i>		
<b>Contributors:</b>	<i>Mark Blackett</i>		
<b>Signed off by:</b>	<i>Ayman Omer</i>		
<b>Date:</b>	<i>31<sup>st</sup> October 2014</i>	<b>Country/Region/Campaign:</b>	<i>Ethiopia/HECA</i>

**1. The context and background of the review**

As part of Oxfam Great Britain’s (OGB) Global Performance Framework (GPF), samples of mature projects are randomly selected each year and their effectiveness rigorously assessed. The facilitating financial services for women beekeepers in Ethiopia project was selected for review in this way under the women’s empowerment thematic area.

The project under review was carried out by Oxfam together with the Zembaba Bees Product Development and Marketing Cooperatives Union in seven *woredas* (districts) of Amhara Region between May 2010 and April 2013. The project aimed at strengthening women’s livelihoods and promoting empowerment, especially by facilitating the formation of 32 women’s ‘self-help groups’ across the seven *woredas*, by supporting their members in taking up or strengthening their beekeeping activities, and by facilitating links to financial services and other service providers.

This Effectiveness Review used a quasi-experimental evaluation design to assess the impact of the project activities approximately six months after implementation ended. The review was restricted to four of the seven *woredas* where the project was implemented, excluding the three that are included in the subsequent, larger-scale honey value-chain development project. It should be noted that the four *woredas* in which the Effectiveness Review was carried out are generally seen to have lower potential for honey production than the other three – so the results of this review may understate the effects of the project across the seven *woredas*.

The review sought to evaluate the impact only among women who directly participated in the self-help groups (SHGs) established under this project and 189 women were interviewed. 438 women were selected at random from nearby communities where the project had not been implemented, for comparison purposes. At the analysis stage, statistical tools of propensity-score matching and multivariate regression were used to control for apparent baseline differences between the SHG members and comparison respondents, to increase confidence when making estimates of the project’s impact. In addition, 11 focus group discussions were held with SHG members and ten with male members of their households, and in-depth interviews were carried out with local leaders and extension agents, to provide deeper insights on the impact of the project than could be captured in the quantitative survey.

## 2. Summary main findings and recommendations

### Key results of this Effectiveness Review

Outcome area	Evidence of positive impact	Comments
Engagement in beekeeping	Yes	More of the households of SHG members are engaged in beekeeping, women have increased their participation, and many have experimented with new technologies.
Sales of honey	Yes	Revenue generated from sales of honey among households of SHG members is more than double that of the comparison households – though it is still small in magnitude.
Savings	Yes	Most self-help group members have some personal savings, and half had saved during the month prior to the survey
Access to and use of credit	Yes	SHG members are more likely to have borrowed both from the group and from microfinance institutions.
Dietary diversity	Yes	Self help group members and their households have a significantly more diverse diet than comparison households
Women's empowerment	Yes	Clear impact on women's personal savings and on participation in community groups. Little or no indication of positive changes in other areas of women's empowerment.

Results apply to all members of the 13 self-help groups established under this project in the woredas of Bahir Dar Zuria, Gozamen, Gondar Zuria and Lebokemkem who were available and willing to be interviewed at the time of the survey, with the exception of the approximately 10 per cent of SHG members who live at particularly large distances from their kebele centre.

#### Recommendations:

##### Ensure the appropriate level of support is in place when introducing new technologies.

The Effectiveness Review provides evidence that new beekeeping technologies and practices introduced under this project can enable women to take on significant roles in honey production and marketing, overcoming traditional attitudes that this beekeeping is suitable only for men. However, it is clear that prerequisites to success are that learning about the technologies is fully embedded, that the required equipment and inputs are available, and that extension agents are fully involved and able to provide effective advice and support. Even more importantly, it appears that a good level of support and follow up is required in order that group members feel confident that they are able to apply the new technologies effectively, and that they will not be deterred by initial setbacks.

A related consideration is about the appropriate level of intensity required for a project such as this. The project under review was originally intended to have a larger budget and to allow for a more intense package of advice and support to be provided to SHG members. Once it was clear that the planned budget was not available, it would perhaps have been more effective to have reduced the scale of the project in order to provide concentrated support to a smaller number of self-help groups, rather than a less comprehensive package for a greater number.



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**Continue to design more holistic projects and programmes, with specific strategies to contribute to women’s empowerment and minimise risks of participation.**

Another implication of this Effectiveness Review is that, even if a project can successfully encourage women’s engagement in a new livelihood activity that is not by itself sufficient to achieve empowerment in a broader sense. It is important to note that the project under review initially focused on beekeeping as a livelihoods activity and on promoting business development, and did not (at least at the design stage) have a clear strategy by which the project was expected to lead to social empowerment or to manage risks of women’s participation. The weakness of this approach has already been recognised, as evidenced by the design of the current honey value-chain development project, which incorporates a specific gender strategy, including community forums, literacy training, and the promotion of labour-saving devices. There will always be a tension between the extent to which a programme should focus on business development and social justice, but it at least seems to be clear that social empowerment will not necessarily result from economic empowerment.

**Carefully monitor the requirements that project activities place on participants’ time, in order to mitigate any negative consequences.**

The fact that SHG members were more likely than comparison respondents to report that they have experienced a decrease in the time they spend sleeping over the past few years serves as a reminder of the importance of being aware of the additional burden that project activities place on participants. Clearly it is important to ensure that the value being realised through any intervention outweighs the potential costs, either in terms of increased stresses on participants or their family members, or in terms of reduced engagement in other livelihoods activities. This should be monitored carefully in current and future projects through the use of regular discussions with group members, so that action can be taken to reduce those burdens if necessary. It is also possible that the greater use of labour-saving technologies may be able to support women in reducing household responsibilities and encouraging men to take on some of these duties.

**Review the monitoring, evaluation and learning approaches for current and future projects, particularly in order to monitor changes in the enabling environment and how project participants are responding to them, as well as how this is translating into increased empowerment.**

The results of this Effectiveness Review reinforce the need for investment in a comprehensive system for monitoring implementation and outcomes. In particular, these findings suggest that emphasis should be put on monitoring of changes in the context (such as the availability of inputs or the involvement of extension services) and on regular discussions with project participants on the effects of the project activities, while implementation is proceeding. Just as important is to monitor how the effects of projects are distributed across different groups of participants, so as to improve the effectiveness with which interventions can be targeted.

The issues raised in this report can also be used to inform the questions to be investigated in more formal evaluation processes. In particular, the inclusion of indicators of access to and use of credit, of time use, and of contact with extension services and other service providers will strengthen the midline and endline surveys to be carried out for the current honey value-chain development project, and for future similar initiatives. At the same time, the refinement and testing of indicators of social empowerment should continue, to ensure that they provide as full and accurate a picture as possible of women’s experience of empowerment in Ethiopia.

**3. Overall do the findings of the review concur with your own expectations or assessment of the project's effectiveness?**

Yes. The findings of the review were based on a thorough assessment that includes intensive discussions with various stakeholders (women groups, community members, extension agents, Oxfam staff and partners and, other actors). The findings of the review are consistent with those of the external programme review.

**4. Did the review identify areas that were particularly strong in the project?**

The review identified strong areas related to:

- Increased women's engagement in beekeeping and; up-taking new technologies
- Increased women's income from beekeeping as a result of increased price that women in SHGs were able to command by selling to cooperatives,
- Improved savings and access to finance,
- Enhanced women solidarity through self help group formation.

**5. Did the review identify areas that were particularly weak in the project?**

The review identified the following areas that need to strengthen:

- Support to women to negotiate new social and economic roles
- Extension support to support new practices (aiming at increasing honey production)
- Intensive monitoring and adaptation of activities to enable women to manage the risks, especially around increasing workload.

**6. Summary of review quality assessment**

The assessment methodology, process and the review's report were of high quality despite the relatively short period allocated for data collection.

**7. Main Oxfam follow-up actions**

Strengthening MEL (including a robust baseline); integrating activities and approaches to manage risks to women and; ensuring holistic interventions in collaboration with other stakeholders.

**8. Any conclusions/recommendations Oxfam does not agree with or will not act upon**

No disagreement to any of the recommendations.

**9. What learning from the review will you apply to relevant or new projects in the future? How can the regional centre/Oxford support these plans?**

Based on the learning from the project under review, Oxfam developed a long-term project to support women in honey value chain. This project is funded by Comic Relief and; integrated the following areas relevant to the findings of the effectiveness review:

- More holistic programme that involves various stakeholders based on their value added (e.g. an agreement was signed with SNV to work on access to finance);
- Stronger MEL framework has been developed. This includes: a baseline using RCT methodology and, a gender analysis focusing, among others, on VAW More holistic design that involves different stakeholders at all stages;
- A detailed gender strategy has been developed focusing on supporting women to negotiate new roles in their social and economic lives;

Moreover, Oxfam is testing a Rapid Care Analysis in other two projects. Learning will be integrated in the honey value chain programme to enable women managing potential risks related to workload.

**10. Additional reflections** that have emerged from the review process but were not the subject of the evaluation.

None.